DOCUMENT RESUME

ED 170 248 SP 014 100

AUTHOR English, Raymond
TITLE Curriculum Development by a Not-For-Profit Organization. The Experience of the Educational Research Council of America in Social Science Education.
SPONS AGENCY National Inst. of Education (DHEW), Washington, D.C. Task Force on Curriculum Development.
PUB DATE 26 Oct 76
NOTE 11p.; Paper prepared for the NIE Curriculum Development Task Force; for related documents, see SP 014 095-115, SP 014 185-186, ED 124 530, ED 140 401, and ED 144 217

EDRS PRICE MF01/PC01 Plus Postage.
DESCRIPTORS *Curriculum Development; *Curriculum Research; *Educational Change; *Educational Policy; *Government Role; Information Dissemination; Instructional Materials; Private Agencies

ABSTRACT

Some conclusions about curriculum development arising out of an experience in developing a social science program are summarized. The following topics are briefly presented: (1) what works best in the classroom and what is the most efficient way of attaining educational goals; (2) the necessary involvement of scholar consultants in social science disciplines, experts in pedagogy, practicing teachers and administrators, and representatives of ethnic and religious groups, experts in testing and evaluation, and professional writers; (3) field-testing materials; (4) the aims of field-testing; (5) information dissemination; (6) feedback and revision; (7) sequencing of educational materials; (8) teacher attitudes and student involvement; (9) cognitive and affective learning; and (10) long-term research and development essentials. A consideration of obstacles to reform of curriculum is presented. A short discussion of the role of the federal government in curriculum development is appended. (JD)

****
* Reproductions supplied by EDRS are the best that can be made *
* from the original document. *
****

ED170248

CURRICULUM DEVELOPMENT BY A NOT-FOR-PROFIT ORGANIZATION

The Experience of the Educational Research Council of America in Social Science Education

By Raymond English
Director, Social Science Program
Educational Research Council of America
614 Superior Avenue
Cleveland, Ohio 44113

U.S. DEPARTMENT OF HEALTH, EDUCATION & WELFARE
NATIONAL INSTITUTE OF EDUCATION

THIS DOCUMENT HAS BEEN REPRODUCED EXACTLY AS RECEIVED FROM THE PERSON OR ORGANIZATION ORIGINATING IT. POINTS OF VIEW OR OPINIONS STATED DO NOT NECESSARILY REPRESENT OFFICIAL NATIONAL INSTITUTE OF EDUCATION POSITION OR POLICY

A paper prepared for the
NIE Curriculum Development Task Force

October 26, 1976

SP 014 100

Introductory Note

This paper sums up some conclusions about curriculum development arising out of the experience of the Educational Research Council of America (ERCA) in developing a social science program over the period 1961-76.

Since space is limited, and since this is a working paper, the various conclusions are summarized under brief headings. A more discursive essay, parts of which will appear in Social Education, can be supplied on request.

1. Pragmatic Approach

ERCA's approach to educational R & D has from the outset been pragmatic. While taking account of basic research and theoretical constructs, the Council has concentrated on the questions "What works best in the classroom? What is the most efficient way of attaining the educational objectives?"

2. Who Is Involved

The materials prepared by and for the National Council on Educational Research frequently mention the idea that the main issue in curriculum development is how it is done and by whom. ERCA concurs in this idea. In a pluralistic free society curricula should not be monolithic

or monopolistic, and even the development of a specific curriculum should include inputs from many individuals representing varied points of view and various sectors of society. The ERCA social science program utilizes scholar consultants in the social science disciplines, experts in pedagogy, practicing teachers, school administrators, representatives of ethnic and religious groups, experts in testing and evaluation, and professional writers, editors, and artists.

3. Field-Testing

In the experimental stage the program materials are field-tested for several years in many classrooms. In a given year, materials for one grade may be used by as many as 25,000 pupils, whose classrooms are visited by Council observers and whose teachers supply formal and informal feedback reports to the ERCA. In the light of this field-testing the materials are revised.

4. Aims of Field-Testing

Among the aims of the tests are the following:

a. to ensure that materials are suited to grade level

b. to find out how young people learn most effectively

c. to ascertain that teachers can handle the concepts and skills to be developed

d. to discover the best methods of instruction

e. to find out from teachers what "activities" should be introduced through the teacher's guide

f. to check community and group reaction to the materials

g. to assess economic factors affecting adoption of the program

5. Dissemination

After the period of experiment and wide field-testing, the materials are published and distributed by a commerical publisher. In the case of the ERCA social science program, the publisher is Allyn and Bacon. Thus the ERCA hands the dissemination of the materials to an organization with the necessary publishing facilities, sales staff, and contacts throughout the educational system. The ERCA retains editorial control of all material it develops, including that which is published and distributed by a commercial publisher.

6. Further Feedback and Revision

The process of revision and feedback does not end with national distribution. Indeed, it becomes more complex, as input is received from all over the United States. Frequent new editions incorporate new educational insights as well as recent events, scholarly research, and pedagogic innovations.

7. The Learning Process: Sequence and Accumulation

Learning for most people most of the time is a gradual, cumulative process. In early stages of education the process is almost unconscious, in the sense that the learners are seldom able to identify articulately the objectives at which they aim. Planned repetition and careful sequence are therefore essential in the curriculum. At later stages of education, repetition, sequence, and cumulative learning must continue, but increasingly the student can and should become conscious of long- and short-range objectives. Curricula must be designed from grade to grade so as to develop conceptual knowledge and skills in a logical, cumulative fashion. Care must be taken to use terms consistently, and to avoid teaching things that at more sophisticated later stages will have to be rejected or drastically modified.

8. The Learning Process: Involvement and Investigation

Learning requires active participation rather than passive absorption. It is therefore necessary to use instructional methods that challenge the students, and that compel them to engage in problem-solving. This in turn may call for changing the teachers' attitudes. In social science, it has been found advisable to introduce many questions

and problems in the body of the pupil materials and to indicate in a comprehensive teacher's guide ways of coping with the problems.

9. Cognitive and Affective Learning

Experience suggests that the separation of cognitive from affective objectives in formal education is an unreal dichotomy. If cognitive objectives are pursued seriously, and if the teacher sets an example of intellectual integrity and enthusiastic hard work, the development of desirable affective attitudes in the students will generally follow. There are no doubt some exceptions to this generalization, but it seems to work in practice.

10. Long-term R & D Essential

Educational innovation, for some reason or other, is subject to successive changes of direction. The ideas that pedagogic experts raved about five (or even two) years ago become old-fashioned or obnoxious today, and today's notions will be thrown on the junk heap tomorrow. If curriculum development is to be effective, it cannot zigzag with these swings of opinion. It may and should take account of the more useful fashionable ideas, but it should not be deflected by them. Curriculum development must be a sustained, long-term

project, with clear objectives, and continuous testing and refining. The rising generation deserves something better than a succession of fancy remedial experiments. This, no doubt, is why many experienced and dedicated teachers are suspicious of educational innovation, including curriculum development.

11. Obstacles to Curriculum Development

The last remark leads to consideration of additional obstacles to rational reform of curriculum. Here is a short list, expressed baldly and without elaboration:

a. Institutional conservatism in education. For example, the present structure of the high school curriculum makes impossible planned, cumulative instruction in most subjects over a four-year period.

b. Varied and often educationally irrelevant state legislative requirements in education. For example: American history must be taught at certain grade levels, but the levels are not the same in each state.

c. Rigid departmentalization of subjects (vertical compartmentalization).

d. Absence of, or contradictions among, syllabi and objectives of education from state to state and sometimes from school district to school district.

e. Traditional horizontal compartmentalization of education from grade to grade, or from primary to intermediate school, and from intermediate to junior high and from junior to senior high.

f. Lack of overall goals for education, leading to a frittering of student effort and energy, which in turn leads to student boredom and alienation.

g. The power of organized pressure groups to deflect and distort education. (Concern for group sensitivities is necessary in public education, but the power of militant minorities is often abused.)

h. Legislative requirements for such educational irrelevancies as the single hardbound textbook for a given subject in a given year.

i. The popular notion that all textbooks must be revised every five years often drastically. Most schools reject out of hand any text with a copyright more than five years old. This makes nonsense of careful, long-term curriculum development, although it certainly helps the textbook publishers.

j. The prevalent concept of the public schools as primarily instruments of social engineering (not socialization). This concept is harmful to if not totally incompatible with the idea of liberal, cognitive, intellectually respectable education.

12. The Art of the Possible

The list (which is certainly incomplete) of obstacles to educational reform leads to this final observation. Educational reform, and especially curriculum development, must be regarded as the art of the possible. Such reform must take place in an imperfect world, and the researchers and developers must be realistic in assessing what is possible at a given stage. Field-testing and constant feedback are essential. In a free country the market must be the final test of success, but the developers can and should work at changing the tastes and demands of their public.

ADDENDUM

Thoughts on the Role of the Federal Government in Curriculum Development

Here are four brief personal suggestions as to the most effective role of the federal government in the area of curriculum reform.

1. The federal government should eschew direct development of curriculum.
2. Whether the government should contract with private or public organizations to develop curriculum is debatable.
3. The federal government could and should undertake or subsidize basic research in education (pedagogy) and evaluation.
4. Federal projects for periodic scholarly surveys on the state of the disciplines, with wide dissemination of the product, would be most helpful to curriculum developers and to teachers.